

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN
GRAY 233

"Who?"
He laughed. "Lady Narborough," he
whispered. "She perfectly adores him!"
"You fill me with apprehension. The appeal to
Antiquity is fatal to us who are romanticists."
"Romanticists! You have all the methods of
science."
"Men have educated us."
"But not explained you."
"Describe us as a sex!" was her challenge.
"Sphinxes without secrets."
She looked at him, smiling. "How long Mr.
Gray is!" she said. "Let us go and help him. I have not yet
told him the colour of my frock."
"Ah! you must suit your frock to his flowers,
Gladys!"
"That would be a premature surrender."
"Romantic Art begins with its climax."
"I must keep an opportunity for retreat."
"In the Parthian manner?"
"They found safety in the desert. I could not do
that."
"Women are not always allowed a choice," he
answered, but hardly had he finished the sentence before
from the far end of the conservatory came a stifled groan,
followed by the dull sound of a heavy fall. Everybody
started up. The Duchess stood motionless in horror. And with fear
in his eyes Lord Henry rushed through the flapping palms to
find Dorian Gray lying face downwards on the tiled floor in a
death-like swoon.
He was carried at once into the blue drawing-
room, and laid upon one of the sofas. After a short time he
came to himself, and looked round with a dazed expression.
"What has happened?" he asked. "Oh! I
remember. Am I safe here, Harry?" He began to tremble.
"My dear Dorian!" answered Lord Henry, "you
merely fainted. That was all. You must have overtired
yourself. You had better not come down to dinner. I will
take your place."
"No, I will come down," he said, struggling
to his feet.
"I would rather come down. I must not be
alone."
He went to his room and dressed. There was a
wild recklessness of gaiety in his manner as he sat at table,
but now and then a thrill of terror ran through him when he
remembered that pressed against the window of the conservatory,
like a white handkerchief, he had seen the face of James Vane
watching him